

## The Empire and Christianity

343

course to the dangerous expedient of inviting in the barbarian. The land was starving for want of capital and labour, and the barbarian *colonus* was introduced, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, not, if the authorities are to be trusted, by tens, but by hundreds of thousands, " to lighten the tribute by the fruits of his toil and to relieve the Roman citizens of military service." This was the principal and certainly the original reason why recourse was had to the barbarian; the idea that the German or the Goth was less dangerous inside than outside the frontier, and would help to bear the brunt of the pressure from his kinsmen, came later. The result, however, of importing a strong Germanic and Gothic element into the Empire was one of active disintegration. Though they occupied but a humble position industrially, as tillers of the soil, they formed the best troops in the Imperial armies. The boast which Tacitus put into the mouth of a Gallic soldier in the first century, that the alien trooper was the backbone of the Roman army,\* was now an undoubted truth, and the spirit which these strangers brought with them was that of freedom, quite antagonistic to the absolutism of the Empire.

There was yet another great solvent at work,—in its cumulative effects the greatest of them all,—the solvent of Christianity, dissociating, as it did, spiritual from temporal authority, and introducing the absolutely novel idea of a divine law that in every particular took precedence of mundane law. The power of the Church, as a body en-